

National Search Dog Alliance (NSDA)

Open Water HRD Field Test

1. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- This test has been promulgated by NSDA to assess handler/K-9 teams as to operational suitability for typical search incidents.
- The NSDA prerequisites represent those items that we believe will allow the candidate to have the opportunity to safely and successfully complete the search test(s).

2. OBJECTIVE

- The Open Water HRD Test demonstrates the ability of the team to safely and effectively search for subjects in an open water environment from a boat.
- This field test shall demonstrate the ability of the K-9 to search for and recognize the odor of human remains and for the handler to correctly read the behavior of their K-9 partner.
- The handler shall be responsible for formulating and articulating their search strategy and providing the Evaluator with a description of their K-9's typical change in behavior. The K-9 shall give a recognizable change in behavior when it initially detects the target odor. The K-9 shall show significant changes in behavior while in and out of odor and when narrowing the search area.
- This test is designed to simulate an actual search and not team training. You will be asked to approach it as such.

3. GENERAL GUIDELINES

- First time Candidates shall submit training logs that include documentation of at least two blind Open Water HRD problems.
- The test shall only be given if all copies of the prerequisite paperwork and payments have been presented. No payment shall be accepted or held by the Evaluator.
- You will be instructed to upload copies of your documents to the website prior to the test.
- The Evaluator shall remain within normal speaking distance of the handler at all times during the evaluation so as not to interfere with the work of the handler/K-9 team.
- A team shall not be required to test in conditions other than those in which it would be reasonably expected to search.
- No electronic correction collars are permitted to be operational while the team is being evaluated. The K-9 may wear an electronic correction collar as long as the transmitter is turned off and given to the Evaluator until the test is completed.
- The K-9 does not demonstrate unwarranted aggressive behavior towards a person, other K-9s, livestock, or wildlife while outside of their primary enclosure.
- Handlers may draw numbers for the order in which they are to be tested unless there is a strong, overriding reason for convenience of handler or Evaluator.

4. TEST SITE

- The open water/boat search area shall be as close as possible to four (4) acres in size. The body of water may be a lake, stream, pond, river or any other body of water that allows for the size and searching from a boat. The area does not have to be square in shape.

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- The area shall not be used for training or testing for a minimum of four (4) days prior to testing. If there is no current in the water, then one (1) week would be required. There is no limit to how many teams may use the testing area.

• OPEN WATER/BOAT SEARCH

- The boat may be provided by either the Evaluation Team or the host organization. The boat operator may also be provided by either the Evaluation Team or the host organization. However, the following conditions must be met:
 - ✓ The Principal Evaluator determines that the boat is safe for the body of water.
 - ✓ The boat may be of any type that meets the requirement above.
 - ✓ Regardless of the means of propulsion, the boat must contain at least two (2) paddles or oars at all times while the boat is in the water.
- There shall be one (1) source. The source material shall be tissue weighing between approximately three (3) and four (4) pounds. Tissue of appropriate weight may be of a single type (e.g., placenta) or in composite (e.g., partial limb) and contained in a perforated container.
- The depth of the source shall be, at optimum, thirteen (13) feet with a variance of seven (7) feet either way. This would allow the depth to be varied between six (6) and twenty (20) feet below the surface of the water.
- The source may be suspended or floated in cases of deeper water. A weight of sufficient size shall be used to prevent either drift or marine life interference. In some cases, a light steel cable may also have to be used with sufficient floatation to maintain the source and weight of the source. The source may be tethered to a corner or other boundary marker using weighted line or cable.
- The search area shall be denoted either by physical shore based landmarks or by visible floating markers.
- The handler shall develop a search plan and brief the Evaluator. This shall include any weather conditions, water conditions, terrain conditions or water hazards that were involved in determining this plan. If the handler deviates from their search plan, they must advise the Evaluator why they are doing so.
- The team shall have forty-five (45) minutes to complete the search. Rest periods are part of this time.
- The handler must correctly identify the location of the source. This location must be within a distance to the source of twice the depth of the source. (Example: If the source is ten (10) feet deep, their final call marker must be within twenty (20) feet on either side of the source).
- The handler shall place a buoy at the point closest to where they believe the target source is located. Each handler shall provide their own marking buoy. A GPS may be used for marking the target source if agreed upon by the Evaluator and testing candidate.

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6. EVALUATORS

- The evaluation shall be conducted by a designated NSDA Principal Evaluator with the option of a second Evaluator or Apprentice Evaluator, or Board-designated observer(s).
- The Evaluator(s) shall terminate the test if, in their opinion, it becomes hazardous to any of the participants.
- The Evaluator(s) shall have discretion in the administration and evaluation of all portions of the test and/or re-test.

7. DISTRACTIONS

- Natural distracters including, but not limited to, dead animals, food wrappers/containers, and/or uneaten foods may be a part of any of the test components. This simulates what handlers will have to deal with on actual searches. Should the handler call a final response or if the K-9 is unable to work past the natural distracter, it shall be considered a failure. Evaluators shall not clean the areas of any distracters.

8. EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

- NSDA has published a recommended equipment list but, for this test, it is the responsibility of the handler to be adequately equipped and attired.
- Coast Guard approved personal flotation devices (PFD): Everyone who is working on the water must wear a PFD that is approved for the type of water and/or boat. If the test is being conducted near/on Swift Water, then an approved helmet must also be worn.
- The use of a compass or GPS by the handler is recommended but not required.

9. SAFETY

- The Evaluator shall be assured that the handler has proper equipment and supplies for the team when beginning the field test.
- The K-9 and handler must be able to load into and remain calm in the boat provided. The K-9 must remain under the control of the handler at all times during the evaluations. If the K-9 will not load into the boat in a calm and safe manner, the test shall be stopped and considered a failure.
- The Evaluator shall be in radio or cell phone contact with any required subjects for the discipline.

10. KNOWLEDGE AND PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

- The Handler communicates to the Evaluator that they recognize when the K-9 has a change in behavior to the odor of human remains.
- The Handler demonstrates the ability to judge sweeps of areas as to their suitability to the prevailing conditions.
- The Handler communicates to the Evaluator that they recognize when either member of the K-9 team is working ineffectively and takes action to compensate for or remedy the situation.

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11. REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THE OPEN WATER HRD TEST

The following requirements must be successfully completed in order to pass the Water HRD Search Test. If the requirements are not met, the test is considered a failure.

- The K-9 performs a readable change in behavior as described by the Handler within an acceptable distance from a source and locates the source within the allotted time.
- The Handler marks the source within the allowable distance.
- No false alert is given by K-9 and called by the Handler.
- The Handler demonstrates the ability to judge sweeps of areas as to their suitability to the prevailing conditions.
- The Handler shall have control of the K-9 during the testing period.

12. BRIEFING OF HANDLER

- A briefing of the handler shall be held at the test site, or in a meeting of the group that has been scheduled by previous arrangement, as close to test time as reasonable.
- The Evaluator shall carefully explain and identify each handler's test boundaries.
- A hand drawn map including boundaries and landmarks may be used if absolutely necessary.
- The Handler shall address the Evaluator as though the Evaluator were a Search Manager unfamiliar with K-9 search teams and shall introduce the team, explain its capabilities, and ask questions pertinent to the assignment.

13. RE-TESTS

- One testing fee covers an initial test, and a re-test if necessary, within one (1) year of the time of test payment.
- The Evaluator shall mark the scoring sheet in one (1) of three (3) ways concerning the re-test timeline: "Immediately" Must wait - "Three Months" or "Six Months".
- Re-tests during the same testing event shall be at the discretion of the Evaluator, only if time permits and there is justification.
- Should weather or something out of the control of the handler or Evaluator cause a test to be stopped (rain, wind, heat, etc.), the Evaluator, at their own discretion, may offer a re-test at the same testing event.
- If the team fails the re-test, the Evaluator shall mark on the Scoring Sheet when the team is eligible to test again. The team shall not be eligible to test again before a minimum time period of three (3) months. A copy of the Scoring Sheet shall be given to the handler.

14. RE-CERTIFICATION

- Re-certification is required every two (2) years.